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GIRL OF CATHAY



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**PING-KUA, A GIRL OF CATHAY**









AT THE SHRINE OF THE GODDESS  
TEMPLE ON THE TOP OF TAI-SHAN, THE SACRED MOUNTAIN



SOUTH WALL AND MOAT OF NING-YANG

# PING-KUA

## A Girl of Cathay

BY

RACHEL R. BENN, M. D.

11



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## PING-KUA, A GIRL OF CATHAY

BY RACHEL R. BENN, M.D.

### CHAPTER I

IF you go by wheelbarrow or mule-litter across country from the Grand Canal of China at Chi-Ning to the city of Ning-Yang, as you draw near to the old willows by the moat you will see the corner and south side of the city wall, gray in the evening light.

Following the road around to the west you cross the moat on a stone bridge and enter the city through a great arched gateway in the wall. Note the huge iron-clad gates. They open in the middle and swing back against the wall each morning and swing out every night when the drum calls, meeting in the middle, where they are securely fastened by strong bars of wood which reach away across, with their ends fixed in holes at either side of the arch.

Just inside that massive gateway, one morning about twenty years ago, a baby was born. The mother had climbed to the very top of Tai-Shan where the Goddess of Babies has her temple, knocked her head many times before her shrine and, while clouds of incense smoke ascended, had

prayed most earnestly for a son. Then, stealing one of the boy-baby images from the shrine, she had carried it home and cared for it as if it were a real baby, believing the goddess would be pleased and answer her prayer. The whole family had hoped for a son, for girls are not counted as children in Chinese heathen homes. It was because of all this that the faces of grandmother and mother-in-law were dark with frowns and the mother wailed, "*Wo-pu-yao-ti hsia-jen*,"—which being interpreted means, "I don't want a slave." The baby was a girl.

"You bad, wicked woman, whose prayer the goddess would not hear," screamed the mother-in-law, as she fell to beating the poor mother, whose disappointment seemed more than she could bear without added pain.

"Your own ancestors were dogs, or you would have been given a better wife for your son," shouted the grandmother; and the father, hearing the uproar, knew he had been scorned by the gods, and burst into the room, howling, "Degraded daughter of foul ancestors, of what sin are you guilty that this curse is upon you? Throw the little devil away. I'll not be laughed at as the father of another slave."

In the midst of this "domestic cyclone," as Arthur Smith calls it, the helpless babe was slipped away by a servant, wrapped in a long strip of blue cloth, its feet wound around and



arms bound in close to either side, like a little mummy, and laid on a warm brick bed between two small bags of warm sand. There it slept peacefully while the domestic storm raged.

The father had gone stamping out to the courtyard, the grandmother and mother-in-law had screamed themselves hoarse, and the mother had threatened to commit suicide, before any attention was paid to the innocent cause of the turmoil. Then the great-grandmother went and looked down upon the sleeping babe. It was so cunning and pretty that her old heart was touched and she resolved that live it should. Then she began to talk peace, urging her own daughter-in-law to listen to reason and soothing the distracted mother. Finally, seeking the father in the outer court, she said, "Grandson, release your heart. Be angry no more. A great pity it is that a son was not given you, but this *ya-tou* is very pretty. I already see in her a beautiful girl, for whom you can get a rich husband, whose father will give you many strings of cash."

In the Chinese home an aged one's word is law, so the baby was neither given away, sold, nor killed, but lived and slept and stretched its little limbs, growing more charming every day. It had such a bewitching way of looking up into their faces with its large, beautiful eyes, and puckering up its dear little rosebud of a mouth as if trying to talk, that in spite of her disappointment the

mother could not help loving it, and even the angry father took to carrying it around buttoned into the bosom of his upper garment and laughing at its cunning ways.

When the baby was three days old, they pierced its ears, and when a month old they gave a feast. The invited relatives came, bringing presents, and with much ceremony shaved the little head, leaving only a round spot on each side, where the silky black hair was not cut off.

On this memorable head-shaving day, great-grandmother placed on baby's neck a silver chain, from which hung a curious charm. The charm was to ward off the evil influence of the twelve devils that are supposed to haunt each Chinese child, seeking to kill it, for the first twelve years of its life.

As a rule, the girls in China are not named. They are called "*Ya-tou*," i.e., female slave, but great-grandmother insisted on this one's having a name, so they called her *Ping-Kua*, which means apple.

Thus shaven, charmed, named, and her ears pierced to get them ready for the betrothal rings which would some day be hers, little Apple proceeded to grow into a beautiful child. Everyone noticed her large dark eyes, soft black hair, and charming ways, and remarked to her family, "You will be able to get a rich mother-in-law for your *Ya-tou*."

Few things of interest escaped the quick eyes and ears of Ping-Kua, and there was something on the street all day long. She could hardly take time to eat for watching the funeral processions, the wedding presents being carried so all could see them, the peddlers, and the official chairs. Indeed, she often ran with her bowl of cabbage soup and rice in one hand, and her chopsticks in the other and ate as she gazed.

But her special delight was the long caravan of camels carrying great bags of charcoal on their backs. The head camel wore a large bell hung on his neck, which sounded with each step he took, and carried a man as well as coal; the next was fastened to the leader's tail by a cord passed through a hole in his nose, and the next was fastened to his tail in like manner till there were ten or twelve in a line. Ping-Kua never tired watching them, and though they frightened her horribly when they turned their ugly heads, on their crooked, wobbly necks, and looked at her with their accusing eyes, she always flew to the street, when the "Dong, dong, dong," of a camel bell was heard. Sometimes there would be a baby camel tied to its mother and then Apple and the other children would follow at a safe distance to the east gate, laughing and shouting at its long, awkward legs and woolly head, and the way it crowded close to its mother, being afraid. "She can't help it if anybody goes to



hurt it, 'cause her nose is tied to the next camel's tail," remarked one of the boys, as they followed one day.

"Yes, she can," retorted Apple. "I once saw one kick awful with her hind foot."

One day when little Apple was about five years old a wonderful thing happened. She and the neighbor children were playing in the alley. It had rained the night before, and having gathered some of the soft mud from the street, they were squatted on their heels making idols, snakes, and lizards of it, when suddenly such a voice as our little girl had never before heard, said "*Hsiao-hai-tzu-men-ni-tso shumma?*" i.e., "Little children you are doing what?" Looking up Ping-Kua saw right by her side the strangest being! Her eyes were blue, her skin white, without being powdered, and her hair was yellow. Without waiting for a second look, Ping-Kua sprang to her feet and ran like a squirrel.

"Come back. She won't hurt you. We know her," called one of the older girls, and looking back, Ping-Kua saw them talking to the creature that had so frightened her. Slowly and doubtfully she returned, but kept the other children between her and the stranger. But she soon became so interested in what the white lady was doing that she forgot everything else.

Talking in their own language, the lady said, "I, too, can make things out of mud. You

watch me and see for yourselves." As she talked, she took some of the damp earth, rolled it into a ball, shaped it like an egg, with the pointed end a little sharper than an egg ought to be, and then as the children bent nearer — Ping-Kua with the rest — watching with all their might, the deft fingers of the strange being with blue eyes, white skin, and yellow hair, shaped the egg into a mouse. Rolling a bit of the clay into a long tail she then pinched it on the mouse in the right place and held up before their delighted eyes a mouse crouched down, with its tail curled around it, eating something. Ping-Kua danced with delight, and forgetting her fear, held out her hand, and the lady placed the mouse on her palm, telling her that she might keep it. Then she told them how in her home land, America, little children went to a school called a child garden and made things of clay in a beautiful room, instead of on the dirty street, as they were doing.

As Ping-Kua stood with the mouse on her hand, after the lady had disappeared, staring at the place where she had been, one of the children broke the spell by saying, "It was a foreign devil."

"No, it wasn't," spoke up the girl who had called Ping-Kua back. "It was the Jesus doctrine doctor. She comes to the Jesus Hall and treats the sick. My mother took me there and the doctor cured my eyes."

Ping-Kua ran home with the mouse and told a marvelous tale of a wonderful lady who made and gave it to her. The younger women listened with the curiosity of children, but not so the great-grandmother. To her the white lady could be no other than a demon bent on mischief. Who ever heard of a human being with blue eyes and yellow hair? Who could tell what baneful influence had been worked into that mouse to harm the child and destroy the family? Dismayed at what she heard, with her old eyes bulging with fear, she struck the mouse from Apple's hand, caught it up with the tongs and drowned it in the water *kang*; then seizing the weeping girl and calling the other two, now thoroughly frightened, women to follow, dragged her to the shrine of the Goddess of Mercy. Prostrating themselves, they knocked their heads many times on the floor, compelling Apple to do the same. Lighting three sticks of incense, which she stuck in the incense burner, great-grandmother set them smoking before the goddess, and they all again fell to knocking their heads, beseeching the goddess to save them from the demon's curse.



## CHAPTER II

Six years of freedom brought little Apple to her sixth birthday and the beginning of bondage. On that fateful day great-grandmother said to grandmother, "Daughter, it is time the child's feet were bound. She is six years old to-day."

"Oh! no! no! no!" protested Ping-Kua. "Not for a year yet. Great sister's feet were not bound till she was seven."

"Older sister being so plain, there is no hope of a rich mother-in-law for her, so it is not important that her feet be so very small; but you are beautiful and will be a rich man's wife. Come, come, now! See these embroidered pointed shoes your mother has made for you. Without the bandages you cannot wear them."

Bribed by the pretty shoes and some cash, Ping-Kua slowly put out her plump little foot. Grandmother was ready with a strip of strong sheeting an inch and a half wide and two yards long, and passing it several times around the ankle to secure the end, brought it from the inside of the ankle across the top of the foot down over all the toes except the large one, under the foot, up on the inside and around the ankle in a figure of eight, bending all the

small toes, but drawing the little one clear under.

At first the pain was not great, and Ping-Kua made light of it, stepping proudly about, showing off her embroidered shoes to her playmates; but by noon she sat on the *kang* (brick bed) and did not try to walk. By bedtime she was crying and begging piteously to have the cruel bandages taken off.

"No, indeed," replied great-grandmother, who was grieved to see her darling's lovely eyes filled with tears and her sweet little face drawn with pain, "never any more. You must just endure the pain as the other girls do."

By the end of the week the poor little toes, which had scampered here and there with their happy owner, were red and tender, and Apple sat all day long on the *kang* holding her aching feet. But that would never do. She must learn to bear the pain and use her bound feet, mother and grandmother insisted, as they approached to help her down. Ping-Kua appealed tearfully to great-grandma, who had always come to the rescue, but great-grandma replied, "*Mei-fa-tzu, pao-pei*," i.e., "There is no help for it, precious." Then the tortured child flew into a rage, crying out that she could not and would not walk,—that she wanted to die,—and there followed such another scene as occurred when she was born; they trying to pull her off the *kang*, and she resisting with all

her might, biting and scratching like a wild-cat.

"You unfilial, good-for-nothing slave!" cried the mother, making a dive at her. "Why were we such fools as to let you live?"

Between them they dragged her off the *kang* and carried her, screaming and biting, into the court and left her there to go without her supper and stay out over night or walk back. Of course she walked back, but she had to do it on her heels, carefully holding up the sore toes, as she clung to everything within reach.

Such scenes were enacted many, many times. The father threatened to sell her, older sister and companions jeered and exhibited their beautiful (?) small feet, while grandmother and mother coaxed, bribed, scolded, and beat her by turns, drew the bandages tighter and tighter, putting on smaller and smaller shoes, till at last poor little Apple settled down to the dumb endurance of pain, submitting to the inevitable that puts in the faces of the Chinese women the look of hopelessness that so cuts one to the heart.

Before that time arrived, however, there were many weary months of suffering; many days of agony, and nights when she could not sleep for the pain and yet dared not moan and wake the others. She ran no more with the camel caravan, but sat in the gate looking wistfully after it. Even the candy man didn't draw her often



into the street, unless he stopped near their door.

One day, about two years after her feet entered into bondage, as Apple played jack-stones on the steps, an unusually gorgeous funeral came by, and, springing up, away she went with the throng of children, who ran by the side of the procession,—not as she used to run, but surprisingly fast considering the condition of her feet.

She wanted to see all the wonderful display, but, becoming weary, and her feet aching horribly, she fell behind the rest and, coming to what looked like the entrance to a temple, dropped down on the steps.

After the procession had all passed by, curiosity prompted Ping-Kua to enter and take a peep at the idols. When she shyly looked in at the door, to her surprise no idols were there, but opposite the door, in a fine shrine with silken curtains at the sides, sat the image of an official in his robes of state. In front was a large bronze incense burner, in which smoked several sticks of lighted incense. Piled high on either side of the image were many volumes of blue-covered books. The room did not look like a temple, and while Ping-Kua was hesitating between entering, or running away, an old man with white hair and beard came from one corner of the room, where a bed, table, books, and teacups showed the room to be his dwelling place, and smiling upon her,

said, "Little daughter, from where have you come?"

There was something so kind in his voice and face that the child could feel no fear, and stepping over the high doorsill, she answered his questions about her age and name, and then began to tell him of the funeral she had been following.

The old man sat down and listened, greatly pleased with the artlessness and beauty of his visitor. She told of the gorgeous umbrellas, banners, flags, and "tens and tens" of beautifully dressed priests. "And the coffin! You should have seen the thirty carriers, the red lacquer carrying poles, and the golden dragons embroidered on the red satin cover! He must have been a great man," she added, as, with a sigh, she sat down on the floor, and gathering her aching feet into her hands to ease them, looked up at him.

"A great man, was he? And of what advantage is it to be great?" slowly answered the aged one, more as if speaking to himself than to the girl. "I, too, was a great man, and what am I now?"

The loving child heart caught the pathos in his face and voice and quickly responded, "Are you not a great man still, honorable old head?"

"Alas, no! Once this whole place was our home. All the courts and large buildings about here were ours. Now most of them belong to others. We are considered a high family yet, but alas! alas!"



The little girl had her own troubles, but her heart went out to the sorrowing old man, and rising, she placed a sympathetic hand upon his knee, saying, "Grandfather, isn't this hall yours? This is a great place."

"Yes, but in the past we were as if belonging to the royal family. Child, do you see yonder shrine? That image is of my father. Those books are our family record for twenty generations. I am eighty and one years old. I live only to guard this shrine and worship my ancestors."

Ping-Kua gazed with awe upon the shrine, image, and books, and then upon the white hair and beard of her host, and wished they would give him as grand a funeral when he died as the one she had just seen. Then, suddenly, remembering she was farther from her own door than she was allowed to go alone, she made the old man a courtesy, slipped out, and hastened home.

### CHAPTER III

IN that same Chinese city, Ning-Yang, there lived a family by the name of Wu, and a proud old family it was. Their record ran back for many generations without a break, and to keep that line unbroken was the dearest wish of their lives; for though they had lost official rank and most of their great wealth, they had kept all the family pride.

It so happened that though many children had been born to them, only one was a boy. Upon him rested all their hopes, for daughters are not reckoned as children by a Chinese father. They belong to the families of the men to whom he marries them.

One morning about two years after the events of the last chapter, the Wus were gathered in a solemn council. The all-important subject under consideration was the finding of a wife for Lung-Chu, the son,—one favored of the gods, who would become the mother of sons, that her sons, and their sons' sons, might worship at the graves of the Wus, thus insuring peace and plenty to the spirits of the dead ancestors. A fortune-teller had selected the day as a lucky one. A necromancer was present.

The council was opened by placing burning incense and food before the ancestral tablets. Each male in the order of his age — the oldest first—prostrated himself before them and knocked his head on the floor three times. The necromancer then came forward and, spreading out the Wheel of Life and his books of magic and astrology, with a great showing of mystery and wisdom, cast the boy's horoscope, which was carefully written down.

The necromancer having been feasted and escorted to the outer gate, a go-between was called. Very minute directions were given her as to the kind of girl she should find, special emphasis being laid upon health and the smallness of feet. She was promised an unusually large fee if she brought them a prize.

During the council all turned reverently to a white-haired grandfather, who occupied the seat of honor, asking his advice. He said but little and spoke of no particular family or girl, but all the time he felt the touch of a child's hand upon his knee, and before the eyes of his memory was the picture of a sweet little girl sitting, tailor-fashion, on his floor, looking up at him with soft, sympathetic eyes; and later he waylaid the go-between and told her of Apple's visit. He concluded with, "She said she was eight years old and her father's name was Wei,\* living on Right-

\*Pronounced Way.



eous Harmony Street. It must be near, for her feet were tender from the binding, and she couldn't have come a great way. That was two years ago. She had moth eyebrows, deer eyes, cherry lips, and her hair was like the raven's wing. Find us that girl for our boy's bride, and I will double your fee."

Double her fee! The go-between's heart leaped at the thought. What was more, a friend of hers (also a go-between) had told her that very morning of having been employed by a Wei family to find a rich mother-in-law for their unusually pretty daughter, and who knew but she was the very one? If so, what luck! None of this, however, appeared in her face. She was an oriental. Also, she earned her living by her wits and, knowing the grandfather had set his heart on that one girl or he never would have offered to double her fee, she thought he probably would give still more. So she looked discouraged, said it was impossible to find a child among so many, and, if by chance she should succeed, she would have wasted so much heart and received so much weariness, he ought in all conscience to give at least ten more strings of cash.

But Grandfather Wu was also an oriental, and he knew that, as likely as not, the go-between was well acquainted with the Weis, and refused to give another cash. They compromised at length by his adding five strings and, highly elated

at her own shrewdness and the luck the gods had sent her, she hastened away in search of her friend.

After much talk and drinking of boiling hot tea, the go-between told her friend the news, and together they went to Righteous Harmony Street.

They found Apple at her father's gate in a group of children surrounding the taffy man. Buying some taffy, the Wei go-between drew her to the steps and engaged her in conversation while they ate, that the other go-between might take a good look at her.

Presently the Wu go-between asked, "Are you the little Wei girl who once visited a venerable grandfather in what you took to be a temple?"

Frightened, the child shrank behind her own go-between, and timidly replied, "It was a long time ago, and I did no harm. Why do you ask?"

"Of course you did nothing wrong, precious. I just wanted to know if it were you. That aged white beard was very much pleased with you," the go-between replied; then taking leave of her friend, she went home and prepared a feast to celebrate the wonderful good fortune of the day's work.

The Wei go-between went in with Ping-Kua and was feasted by the family, as she gave them a greatly exaggerated account of the wealth, position, and good qualities of the prospective mother-in-law she had found for their daughter.

The next day the Wu go-between reported secretly to the grandfather and openly to the family. All the girl's good points were set forth with little regard for the truth. She was modest, good-tempered, polite, obedient, and very beautiful. Her eyes, hair, and especially the smallness of feet already obtained were dwelt upon at length.

Negotiations were soon on foot between the two families. A necromancer was employed by the Weis. Ping-Kua's horoscope was cast, written out on red paper, and sent to the Wus, and they sent to the Weis the horoscope of Lung-Chu.

Again the wise man who read the stars and interpreted the mysteries of the universe came, this time to compare the two horoscopes.

Great was the suspense of Grandfather Wu while this was being done. Now that he knew it was his charming little friend who might become one of the family, he dreaded losing her, and there might be something in their birth records which would spoil all his plans. Lung-Chu was born under the auspices of the rat. Ping-Kua might have been born under the influence of the cat, in which case it would never do to unite them, for cats kill rats. At last, to his great relief, the wise man announced that the two horoscopes harmonized.

Everything was soon completed after that. The great red betrothal cards were made out,



put in their gorgeous red, gold-decorated envelopes and exchanged, and the boy and girl were united by China's most unbreakable bond, the marriage betrothal.

They were but children, he fifteen and she ten. They never had seen each other, and never would till they were man and wife, but the necromancer had read the secrets of the gods and found out that upon the glittering fields of the northern ice, in the moonlight, the old God of Matrimony had tied their feet together with a red silk string, eons and eons before they were born — therefore, married they must be.

For the boy, life went on the same. He was in school and remained there. Rumors of the good times, with athletics and military drill, enjoyed by the boys of the mission school at Great Peace City having reached Lung-Chu, he determined to attend that school. His people did not like the idea. They much preferred his remaining where Confucius was worshipped every morning and where no foreign religion was taught; but he always had had his own way, and was then a pupil in the "Jesus people's" school.

But, for the girl, many things were changed. She no longer belonged to her own people. She belonged to the Wus and remained with the Weis till such time as her husband's family saw fit to send for her. The thing for which her life had been spared, the thing which from infancy she had

heard talked of as her destiny, had come to pass. She was *ting-kui-liao*, i.e., bargained for by a rich family. The engagement rings hung in the holes that had been made in the three-days-old baby's ears for that purpose, and all the neighbors knew when they saw them that she was engaged.

Very proud was Apple of the fact, and I'm afraid she tossed her pretty head oftener than was at all necessary, that the ear-rings might the better be observed. Henceforth, she must keep indoors and diligently learn to sew, cook, wash, and embroider. She must learn the etiquette to be observed by a daughter-in-law, and patiently bear the pain of her gradually diminishing feet. Poor little Apple! The bandages did hurt so cruelly. It also hurt her loving heart to know that even great-grandmother regarded her now as belonging to some one else.



## CHAPTER IV

FIVE years went by with nothing of interest, just the same dull round, and then one day something happened. A messenger from Mr. Wu brought word that the fortunate date, fixed by the stars and announced by the necromancer for his son to claim his wife, was the fifth day of the sixth moon. A servant would wait upon Mr. Wei on the morrow bringing money, the wedding garments, and wedding presents.

Ping-Kua was really frightened, as every Chinese bride has good reason to be, but true to the etiquette for girls, she pretended to be much more so than she really was. Crying and protesting that she couldn't leave her parents, she ran and hid when the presents and wedding finery came. She was longing to see them, and pleased as well as frightened at the near approach of the great day of days, but it would have been very immodest to show it, so she continued to cry; and it was not until her mother and some neighbors fairly carried her into the room where they were that she would look at the beautiful garments in which she was to be dressed.

Busy days of preparation followed, and by the fourth day of the sixth moon all was in readiness.

Little Ping-Kua, child though she was, would be carried out of the gate before daylight of the morrow and must be dressed for the great event.

If the grandmother felt sorry for the little girl, she did not show it. If the mother, remembering her own marriage and what she went through, longed to comfort her daughter, she said not a word. But great-grandmother, whose heart yearned over the child who from her birth had been her pet, and whom she was about to lose, called Ping-Kua to the brick bed which she was no longer able to leave, and holding the warm, young hand in both of her old, withered ones, talked long and lovingly to the trembling bride.

"Precious," she said, "heed my words. No matter what they say or do to you to-morrow, don't for your life speak, cry, or show in any way that you care. They will all be watching you, and your future happiness depends upon your making no sign. When you arrive, they will take you out of the chair and lead you into the house where your husband will worship Heaven. When he lifts your veil and sees your face for the first time, don't raise your eyes; keep them on the floor, and remain motionless. He cannot help being pleased with your face and feet, and if you have perfect control of your feelings, all will be well. You must worship the ancestors, knock your head on the floor before your mother-in-law, father-in-law, and all the rest of the family, and

your husband, as you have been taught. When the ceremonies are over and they seat you on the brick bed, clasp your hands in your lap and fasten your eyes upon them. The guests will all come and stare at you, remarking on your looks, dress and temper,—hateful remarks, to make you angry; funny ones, to make you laugh; unkind ones, to make you cry. They will try to make you look up or speak. Do neither. They will say you are bad tempered and very homely, and they will pull your clothes and throw rice over you and down your neck, but remember, neither laugh, cry, get angry, speak, nor look up. It will be over at last, and the women will come, take off the wedding garment and dress you as a daughter-in-law. They will pull out the hair on your temples by the roots, making your forehead square, to show that you are a married woman, and dress your hair in the married woman style, and you will be settled for life."

As evening approached, the women — mothers of sons — who had been chosen to dress the bride, took Ping-Kua in hand. They powdered her face and neck till they were white like an idol's, touched her lips with red, and brushed a hint of red on her cheeks. Then her heavy black hair was done up on her head for the first time and stuck through with ornamental hairpins that came out over her ears. Red artificial flowers followed. The bandages were drawn a little





THE BRIDAL CHAIR



tighter on the poor crippled feet and covered by beautifully embroidered shoes. Next, the lovely red satin wedding garment was donned. The finishing touch was green jade ear-rings, gold rings, and bracelets, and our Ping-Kua looked like a gorgeous oriental doll, only she was flesh and blood, and in her great dark eyes there brooded a haunting fear. Remember, she was an utter stranger even to the man to whom she was to be married.

According to the custom for brides in China, Ping-Kua had eaten but little food for three days, and there must be no sleep for her that last night.

By three o'clock in the morning the bang! bang! of the big brass cymbals and the long-drawn-out wails of the dismal horns were heard from far down the unlighted street. The disturbed sleepers turned on their *kangs* thinking, "Only a bride being carried to her mother-in-law," and dropped off to sleep again, while trembling Ping-Kua clung desperately to her life-long protector, great-grandmother.

The red marriage chair, with its images and artificial flowers, red carrying-poles and carriers, stopped at the Wei's gate.

With many admonitions as to how she should conduct herself, the yard-square of soft red silk, which is the wedding veil in China, was thrown over Apple, a corner in front and one behind covering her to the knees, and she was more carried

than led over the path of red cloth spread down for her to walk upon to the chair, put in it and the door closed and locked. Then the carriers swung the gorgeous chair to their shoulders and, following the lantern bearers who led the way with large red lanterns, amid the din of fire-crackers and the clashing, bellowing, and wailing of musical instruments, which were supposed to represent the grief of the daughter at leaving her father's house, Ping-Kua went out of the gate.

## CHAPTER V

ACROSS the country from east, west, north, and south, wheelbarrows, piled high with bundles of clothing and bedding, and with a girl in the midst on each side, propelled by one man pushing behind and another pulling in front, were making their creaking way toward Great Peace City, bound for the mission compound on "The-Way-to-the-Clouds" Street, just outside the city wall, opposite the Great Temple.

It was a busy day at the girls' school. Receiving and registering the girls, assigning rooms and looking over each bundle of clothing to see if the required garments, bedding, combs, towels, and razors for the head shaving had been provided, kept the foreign teacher busy indeed; and when a servant came, saying "The Shepherd-of-the-Flock from Ning-Yang would speak with you about a *yao-chin-ti-shih-ching*," i. e., very important business, she gasped. How could she stop to talk with him? If the Chinese would only state their business at once, it would not be so bad, but they must drink tea and talk "an old half day" before coming to the point. She found him in the study, and to her great relief he commenced with "Pardon me, please, for taking any



of your valuable time this morning, but I am asked to see you on what I fear will be a difficult business. As you are so busy, I will waste no time on the polite, ceremonious Chinese way—no, don't send for tea—but state my errand at once, like a foreigner. You know Wu Lung-Chu of the boys' school?"

"Yes, he is our best scholar."

"Well, his family is in great unrest. They married him to a girl with whom the rest of the family are well pleased, but Lung-Chu cannot bear to look at her face. According to our customs, she has no faults. She is good looking, silent, obedient, and a good worker, but her husband declares she knows nothing, and her small feet, of which they supposed he would be proud, he thinks are hideous. He says the girls here at school are able to read and sing and are intelligent. Moreover, their feet are natural, and they can walk properly instead of hobbling along stiff-legged.

"Both families are eating a great deal of bitterness over the situation. No one can do anything with Lung-Chu. He has always had his way. In their despair, his parents have given birth to a good scheme, if it can be carried out, and that is my business here this morning. They beg you to receive Ping-Kua, their daughter-in-law, into this school. They hope that when she can read and sing their son may be reconciled to her."

The foreign teacher's face was a study. "Here *is* a situation," she thought. "It has never been the custom of our Woman's Foreign Missionary Society to admit married women to the girls' schools. They have always attended the training schools. But this married woman is but a child, only fifteen. Who knows but it might be the beginning of a Christian home for the leading pupil of the boys' school, who will probably be a power in the New China?"

When she spoke, it was to say, "I hesitate about opening our girls' boarding school to married women, but perhaps it is best in this case. I must know more about her people first. Ask her mother-in-law to come to visit the school and see me. Meanwhile, say nothing of this to anyone."

A few days later the parents of Lung-Chu came to visit their son. While there it was the most natural thing in the world to call upon the foreign ladies at the woman's hospital and the girls' school. Of course they had a private interview with the head of the school. She was greatly pleased with them. Evidently they were of a much higher class than most of those who sent their daughters there to school. However, there must be no mistakes made, and she listened again to the case, then told them plainly that if she received their daughter-in-law it would be a special favor, and they must help all they could.

"In the first place," she said, "her feet must be unbound. We admit no girl with bound feet."

That was a poser, but remembering Lung-Chu's remarks about his wife's small feet, they consented.

"Then," continued the teacher, "you know ours is a Christian school. We do not require our pupils to become Christians, but teach them all the 'Jesus doctrine,' and hope they will believe. Are you willing your daughter should become a Christian if she so wishes?"

Again they hesitated, but seeing no other way out of their dilemma, replied that they were willing.

When, upon her return from Great Peace City, Mrs. Wu laid before the family the school scheme, Ping-Kua listened with unbelieving ears; but it gradually dawned upon her that they meant to send her to the foreigners and to unbind her feet for the purpose of making her attractive to Lung-Chu. Despair flooded her soul, and to the astonishment of the mother-in-law the docile, obedient Ping-Kua stood before her, an angry-eyed rebel, pouring out her wrath as fast as she could talk.

"You'll never send me to school. I'll die first. What is the use of my wasting my heart to please Lung-Chu? For eight years I have been tortured to make my feet so small my husband would want me, only to have him say they are



hideous, and now you want to make them large to please him, and the great probability is he would still hate me. It will never do. I won't go!"

Bursting into a storm of tears and sobs, she threw herself prone upon the *kang*, wailing, "Finished! Finished! I'll die."

For two days the poor little rejected bride lay there, a bundle of misery, refusing all food, that she might starve to death and relieve them of her hated presence.

Mrs. Wu was an unusually indulgent mother-in-law, but at last her patience came to an end, and taking Ping-Kua by the shoulders, she shook her soundly. Then, pulling her to a sitting position, she slapped both sides of her face in the Chinese mother-in-law fashion, shouting as she did it, "Now stop this, you bad creature! We are eating enough bitterness over this unfortunate business without your adding to it. You are going to go to school and use your heart to learn to read, or we will divorce you."

Ping-Kua's heart stood still, and her eyes grew wide with fear. She knew full well that they could do what they pleased with her, and none could hinder. She also knew, only too well, what fate would be hers if divorced and cast into the street. Anything would be better than that.

Mrs. Wu had brought back from the girls' school a pattern for a schoolgirl's shoes, and Apple

went to work making shoes, and allowed the bandages to be loosened on her feet. She rebelled no more and did everything they told her to do, but it was with a heart of lead. She didn't want to go to school. She wanted to keep her small feet after getting them by so many years of agony. She was afraid of the foreigners. Didn't great-grandmother destroy her clay mouse and make her knock her head before the idols because she had seen and talked with one of them long ago? Who knew what evil eye they might cast upon her? She was between two great fears,—the one of being cast out, and the other of the foreigners. But her fear of "the outside people" was not so great as the dread of divorce. Her one comfort was the aged grandfather of Lung-Chu. Apple had found an old friend in him, and he tried to cheer her by saying, "Rest your heart, little daughter. If you learn to read the books of the holy sage, Confucius, my grandson cannot help being pleased with you."



## CHAPTER VI

MANY emotions swayed Ping-Kua as from the door of her room, the next morning after her arrival at school, she looked upon a court full of happy-faced, natural-footed girls, running races, playing ball, jumping the rope, and turning the mill grinding beans and corn together for griddle cakes, laughing as they went round and round, while groups of older ones studied aloud, swaying to the rhythm of the text as they repeated it.

As she gazed, astonishment gave place to curiosity, curiosity to disgust. "How masculine! Just like boys. So unladylike. And those feet! Will mine ever be such shovels? Girls so old, too, and not married. Many of them must be older than I am."

Instinctively her hands went up to her hair, and there came over her a great feeling of remoteness and age. She was the only one of eighty pupils without the queue and bangs that proclaim a Chinese girl to be unmarried. Her feelings changed. A wistfulness took the place of repulsion. "How different from anything I have ever known!" she thought. "They are all so free and happy. Oh, dear! I am so different, how can I ever stay?"

Tears welled up in her bewildered eyes, and in all the world at that moment there was no girl of fifteen who seemed more isolated and forlorn than our little Apple. The bottom had fallen out of her world, and she had been thrust into another one where she felt utterly forsaken.

Just then a bell rang merrily, and all ran to get their Bibles and hymn-books and then flocked toward one of the rooms that surrounded the court.

"Come on, we are going to the opening exercises," called her roommates; and slowly — for her feet were in the process of regaining their natural shape and walking was difficult — she followed. No Bible and hymn-book for her; she had never thought of girls being able to learn. Only boys had intellect, and besides it was very unfeminine to study.

The merry throng formed in line, two by two, and Ping-Kua brought up the rear alone.

Someone in the room played a strange tune on something she could not see, and all marked time and then marched to the music into a large room filled with benches and desks and were soon seated, Ping-Kua on the farthest bench by the door. She was no sooner seated, then her frightened eyes were fastened upon the strange being seated by a table on a low platform facing the girls. "This must be a foreign devil woman," her thoughts ran. "She doesn't look like the one who

made the clay mouse. How queerly she is dressed. How immodest to have her dress fit closely and show her form and arms. Is she a married woman? Her hair is done up, but not pulled out across her temples though,"—and again the little hands went up to her own bared brow — "and her feet!" (Apple forgot her forlornness and had to draw her hand back and drop her face up to the eyes into the open end of her wide sleeve to hide the giggle which *would* come when her eyes had reached the lady's feet.) "Such shovels! And of all the ugly shoes one ever saw — plain black, with not a flower or bright thing about them. Of what could such disgusting looking shoes be made?" Just there she was brought back to her senses by the lady's saying in Chinese, "We will sing the one hundred and twentieth hymn."

One of the girls went to a queer-looking box with white teeth along one edge, sat down, worked her feet, ran her fingers over the teeth, and a strange music came out of it. All the girls began to sing, except Ping-Kua, who nearly fell off her seat in astonishment.

"Jesus loves me, this I know,

For the Bible tells me so,"

was what they sang. What it all meant, Apple could not make out, but some one loved some one, and she was very hungry for a little love, just then, thrust out as she was from home among



entire strangers. Who Jesus was she didn't know, only the missionaries were called "Jesus people," but she did know that her life was empty of love, and a great longing rose within her heart to be loved. Great-grandmother Wei loved her, and Grandfather Wu loved her, but they seemed thousands and thousands of miles away, as she sat there so utterly alone. The foreign lady saw the little wife on the back seat, and understood the wistful look on the sweet but sad face, and her heart went out to the lonely child.

Would wonders never cease? After the singing, each girl in the room — herself excepted — opened a book and read in turn. Actually recognized the Chinese characters like *hsien-shengs* ("before-me-born," which means scholar). Ping-Kua's heart began to beat rapidly. If those girls could learn to read, she could and would. Was it possible she, too, could learn to sing and — but no! It was too much even to dream of being able to make music by fingering the white teeth of the box, and yet, the girl who did it was no older than she. A wonderful vision rose before her, and she vowed then and there to throw her whole soul into her new life and learn all it was possible for her to learn. A vow that she kept, as we shall see.

The service over, the pupils marched out in the order in which they had entered, bringing Ping-Kua the last. As she started, the foreign



lady was at her side. She spoke to her lovingly and, putting an arm about her to help her balance on the awkward feet, walked with her, talking as if they were old friends. Something loosened about the young wife's heart, and it expanded even as her feet had straggled out when the bandages came off, and from that hour real life began.

It wasn't easy. The maimed feet took time in recovering, and it was many weeks before she could walk and run easily and without pain, but the glad day came and then how delightful it was. The gymnastic exercises and running and jumping at first shocked all her ideas of modesty, but she soon learned to look forward to them with the joy of a child set free, and later, when there was a kicking match, none kicked higher than Ping-Kua, much to her satisfaction. But that was many weeks after that first day. It was very mortifying to be obliged to enter the classes of the smallest girls, and sometimes, when she caught a significant glance passing between two of them, it made her angry, but she kept on determined to win.

Her greatest trial was being married. It made her so conspicuous to be the only one without bangs and a braid, and then, too, the girls teased her about Lung-Chu. One day, when they had teased her unmercifully, she put on all her wedding finery, powdered her face, and touched her

lips with red and went to morning exercises, thinking to make those who teased envious. All went well till they were leaving the room, and then a hand detained Ping-Kua, and the foreign *hsien-sheng's* voice said, close to her ear, "Go to your room and wash your face. Painting and powdering are false, and we love true things." Oh, how ashamed she was! "Every bride paints her face. Oh, dear! there are so many queer ways at school," she thought, and the powder was first washed off by tears.

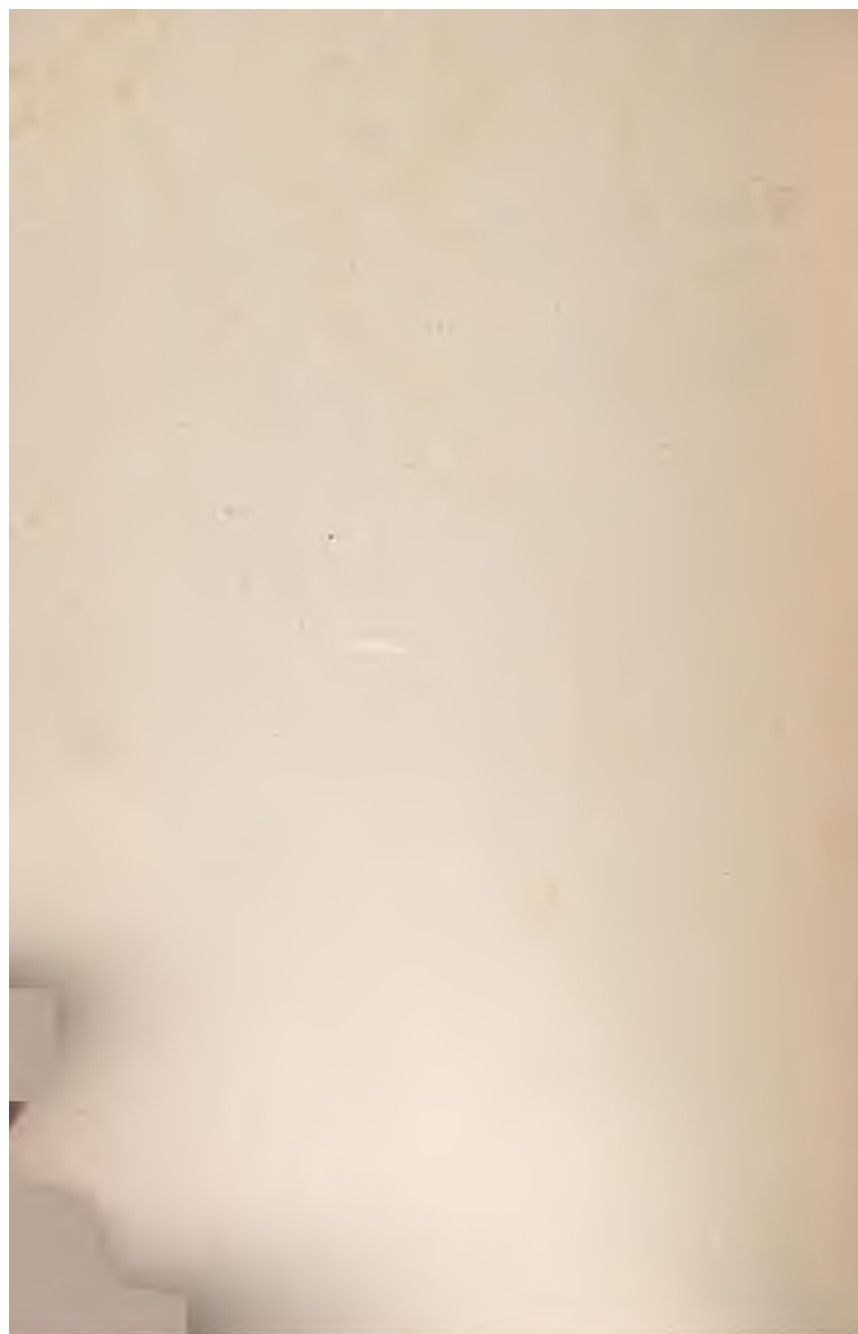
Then Sunday came, and the girls said they all went to worship in the high brick building, whose roof could be seen over the wall surrounding the school premises.

Everything in the new world to which Ping-Kua had come was so different from her past life that the little girl had grown to expect a surprise at every turn; but when with the other school-girls she marched into the Christian temple and found no idols, no incense burning, and no shaven-headed priests, she stared with astonishment.

Where the idols ought to be were only some chairs, a stand with books upon it, and at the side one of those music boxes, with white teeth along one edge, which she now knew to be an organ. There was no more than time to note these things, when the tramp of marching feet coming in behind her struck Apple's ears, and



STUDENTS GOING TO CHURCH





wonderingly she looked around — straight into the eyes of her husband, as he marched up the aisle at the head of a long line of schoolboys.

With a furious blush suffusing her throat and face, Apple quickly turned and sat with downcast eyes, while her riotous heart-beats kept pace with the swift thoughts. "Lung-Chu! And at the head of the schoolboys. How handsome he looked! Did he know of my coming? If not, what will he say and do about it?" Then fiery indignation surged through her being. "What had she done to merit such treatment from her husband? It was through no fault of hers that Lung-Chu despised her. All her life she had been trained to please him, and it was unjust and cruel to treat her with contempt."

The ideal Chinese daughter-in-law who had been taught from the sacred books that girls should have four virtues,—silence, obedience, good looks, and ability to work,—had traveled a long way on the road to individuality in those few days of liberty, that she dared to have such thoughts. But there they were. Moreover, without in the least suspecting it, Ping-Kua had made a grave breach in school etiquette by looking at the schoolboys marching into church, and the girls by her side were nudging each other.

Had Lung-Chu recognized his wife? That he had, and though it was the first he knew of any such scheme as sending her to school, he was too

well versed in Chinese *li*\* to show his surprise and went on as if he had not seen.

Anyone looking at Lung-Chu, as he sat with his eyes on the Bible in his hands, might have supposed him engaged in silent prayer, so serene was his face, but the tumult in his heart was equal to Ping-Kua's agitation. He knew at once the reason of her presence. In but one way was it possible. His parents had sent her. Did they think she could learn? Evidently it was with the hope of winning him she had been put in school. "Well," he thought, "we will wait awhile and see. It is just possible Apple has some intelligence. She certainly is *hao-kan*,† but she must learn better than to look at the schoolboys. *Liao-pu te*!‡ I hope none of the boys will find out she is my wife."

How Ping-Kua did enjoy school life,—once the stage of gasping astonishment was past. Friends, girl friends! For the first time in her life she knew what it was to have free companionship with girls of her own age. Then the music was such a joy. Apple had never sung before, and to her delight it was soon discovered that she had an unusual talent for music and a beautiful voice. One of the American ladies, who was a musician, took Ping-Kua in hand at once, setting her to practising on the organ and to

\*Pronounced *lēc*, meaning etiquette.

†How-kan., i. e., good to look at.

‡Lee-ou-boo-dŭ.

reading music. Every minute not required for other duties, the ardent music student spent drilling away at the organ. Her progress was marvelous, both in vocal and instrumental music, and her beaming face as she sang was good to behold.

Long before Apple could recognize the characters representing them, she had committed to memory the words and music of most of the hymns used in school and worship. The book lessons were also a delight. With them Apple was as quick as with music, and soon left her class far behind.

Time flies when one is busy and happy. Nearly a year had gone when one day, hearing a classmate remark, "Vacation will soon be here," a deadly fear seized Ping-Kua. Perhaps they would not allow her to return to school. She knew it would depend upon Lung-Chu. What would he say?

The same question had risen in the foreign teacher's mind. She did not want to lose her bright pupil, and for the sake of the girl, who had blossomed out so wonderfully in the genial atmosphere of school life, she hoped the husband would continue to be indifferent.

So far Lung-Chu had ignored his wife. He might have called upon her Saturdays, as the other boys called upon their sisters, but he had never done so.

When vacation came, it was with many misgivings that Ping-Kua rode away on the wheelbarrow sent for her, and that her teacher saw her go. What would be the outcome? Again indignation burned in the heart of the rejected wife. Lung-Chu could return to school at his own sweet will, without reference to her, but one word from him would put an end to her happy school life.



## CHAPTER VII

WHEN school opened the following year, to the joy of teachers and pupils, Ping-Kua was in her place.

What a wonderful year of enjoyment and development that was to her! With the same enthusiasm with which in childhood she had followed camel trains, Apple now threw her whole soul into school life. None could run faster, swing the dumb-bells better, or recite lessons equal to Ping-Kua.

Great Peace City lay at the foot of the sacred mountain, Tai, and one lovely spring day the foreign teacher took the school part way up the mountain and turned them loose. When she gave the signal to scatter, with one accord the girls broke into a shout that echoed and re-echoed among the crags, and ran till out of breath. Wild with the pure joy of freedom, up the trail, over the boulders,—wherever a flower was to be found—down the steep banks to the brook that made pools and eddies in its mad race to the plain, went the girls, with Ping-Kua as leader! Ah, it was worth while having her feet unbound to be able to scramble like that!

Weary at last, and laden with flowers, mosses,

pebbles, snail shells, and even little fishes that they had caught in the brook, the school formed into line and, singing the Christian songs, marched home; while the bound-footed girls by the way paused in their grinding at the mill to look enviously after them.

For the third time, at the opening of the girls' school, Ping-Kua Wu (or Wu Ping-Kua, as is the Chinese custom of putting the surname first) was among the pupils. This time it was no forlorn, friendless child who sprang from the wheelbarrow at the mission gate and ran joyously into the school court. It was a self-reliant young lady, who was enthusiastically welcomed by everyone, — especially by the younger pupils, with whom she was a great favorite.

School life went on as usual till Christmas time, approaching, sent a thrill of excitement tingling along the nerves of old and young. Mysterious boxes from that fairyland, *Ta-Mei-Kua*,\* (America) had come for the missionaries. A whisper of something that was to take place in the church had filtered through from the minister's family, whose girls were pupils, and a general spirit of expectancy and secrecy pervaded the school for weeks before active preparations began.

When Christmas eve arrived, all the schools of the mission, all the Christians of the place,

\*Pronounced Dá-May-Gua.

all the servants employed by the mission, the Sunday School scholars, and the patients from the hospital, poured into the church, filling it to overflowing. The church had been decorated by the schoolboys with large gold Chinese characters representing "peace," "love," "joy," "grace," and with evergreens given them by a rich man from his burial grove. The pulpit and altar seemed a bower of potted plants and evergreens, while an illuminated star hung from the ceiling over the pulpit. At one side there was a pyramid made of four ladders, set far apart at the bottom and coming together at the top, on which were hung the presents that had come in those mysterious boxes from America. The church was ablaze with lights and full of people ablaze with oriental garments of many colors.

The first part of the program, consisting of several Christmas songs—one sung by the schoolboys in English — and recitations by the smaller boys and girls, had been rendered when the leader said, "We will now listen to a solo by Wu Ping-Kua." There was a hush all over the house. Eyes were furtively turned upon Lung-Chu. Ping-Kua, dressed elegantly, her naturally beautiful face radiating a higher beauty that comes only with soul growth, went gracefully upon the platform and, forgetting the audience in the rapture of pouring forth the joy of life in song, she filled the church with the sweetest of



music, flinging out her soul in the old triumphant, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come."

The audience seemed to hold its breath while she sang, and when she had finished and was retiring, a sigh passed through the congregation.

If Ping-Kua's singing so affected the audience, what of Lung-Chu?

Although he had ignored his wife's existence both at home and at school all those months, ever since that Sabbath morning when her great sorrowful eyes looked into his as he marched up the church aisle, those eyes had haunted him night and day. From them there was no escape. Furtively he had watched Ping-Kua's development. With secret pride he heard of her wonderful advancement at school, and now as she sang, there was something in her voice besides melody which went straight to his heart. There was a light in Ping-Kua's face which held her husband even against his will, and though outwardly he might have been one of the idols in the great yellow-roofed temple opposite, inside the city wall, so motionless he sat, so expressionless was his face, in his soul a miracle was being wrought. It came to Lung-Chu like a revelation that, comparing the time they had spent in study, Ping-Kua had far outstripped him in scholarship, proud as he had been of his record; that it had been unjust and cruel in him to think her stupid when she had had no opportunity to learn; that she



had a right to his respect for her individuality and his admiration for her mental and spiritual qualities. The old Confucian idea of woman, which he had held, died at that moment, and love — the real love of man for his companion, woman,— welled up in his heart for his beautiful wife, and filled his being with a great content and such joy as he had never known.

## CHAPTER VIII

At the close of Ping-Kua's third year in school, Lung-Chu graduated. He had been the leader of his class for several years, and when the final examination report was given he stood the highest of all.

According to Chinese custom, the names of graduates were posted on the outside wall of the mission compound, where all passers by could see them. The name of the one passing the highest had a red circle drawn around it.

"Ping-Kua! Ping-Kua!" called one of the girls, running into the court the next day after the examinations. "The vermilion pencil has passed around Lung-Chu's name on the wall. The *hsien sheng* told me. Good! Good! Are you not glad?"

Yes, both proud and glad was Apple, but — "What does he think of me? Did he like my singing? Will he accept me now?" were the anxious questions deep in her heart. Oh, if he only would love her, and treat her as the American pastor treated his wife, how happy she would be!

As school drew to a close and all was preparation for departure, poor Apple's heart hung like a ball of lead in her breast. As her husband had



WALL OF GREAT PEACE CITY. TAI-SHAN IN THE DISTANCE





graduated, she would not be allowed to return. This was the last of school for her. No more lessons, music, friends, and good times; and in their place — what? Perhaps divorce, after all.

The evening before home-going, Ping-Kua was in her room "crying her eyes out," when the American teacher came to her and said, with a ring of joy in her voice, "Dry your eyes, little girl, I have good news for you. Lung-Chu is in my room waiting to see you, and from the tone of voice in which he said, 'My wife,' I think your troubles are at an end."

The next morning, amid the good wishes and good-byes of companions and teachers, Lung-Chu took his place on one side of the wheelbarrow that was to carry him home, while a radiant Ping-Kua took her place on the other side; and it was not necessary to inquire what had passed between them the evening before, to know that they were now united by a bond vastly different from the old God of Matrimony's red silk string.

. . . . .

It was one year and a half later, when at night-fall the weary mission doctor, who had traveled by wheelbarrow since daybreak, turned into the court of the native pastor at Ning-Yang. Her one thought was to have something to eat and get into bed, for there would be many patients on

the morrow. An hour had not passed when three sedan chairs were set down at the door. From the first a servant assisted an elderly lady to alight; from the second stepped a very young lady; while from the third came a servant carrying a baby. The ladies and baby were richly dressed in exquisite silk garments of blended colors.

When the doctor's assistant announced callers, the doctor went to the door and was about to receive them in the usual ceremonious way, when the young woman ran forward and, grasping her hands, exclaimed, "*Tai fu!*"\* Don't you recognize me? Joyous is the day upon which I again see your face." It was Ping-Kua. The doctor's weariness vanished, and with joy known only to those who have helped others to a higher plane of life and so to happiness, she welcomed her guests and sat late listening to Ping-Kua's story. "Tell my teachers, when you return, that I shall never forget them," Ping-Kua said, when she had talked till out of breath. "All my happiness I owe to them. I am so happy, *Tai-fu*. My husband loves me and treats me as the foreign shepherds-of-the-flock treat their wives. You remember how I loved music? My husband bought me an organ and I play while we sing together the songs we learned at school. And this is my little son, *Tai-fu*. We are all so happy over him. Come, precious, and let our American

\*Pronounced Die-foo.

friend see how sweet you are." Herself, the beautiful picture which will some day be painted of the New Oriental Woman, with her beaming face against its velvet cheek, she carried the baby across the room and put it in the doctor's outstretched arms, saying, "The name of my precious has been placed on the family record, and grandfather says he is now ready to die, since his eyes have seen the twenty-first generation."









